

Norton Says Making D.C. a First Primary State Meets Party and National Goals - July 21, 2006

Norton Says Making D.C. a First Primary State

Meets Party and National Goals and Pays a Debt to Loyal Democrats

July 21, 2006

Washington, DC-Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) today released a letter to Alexis Herman and James Roosevelt, Co-Chairs of the Rules and Bylaws Committee of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), which is meeting here on Saturday, calling on the Democratic Party to name the District of Columbia as one of the first four presidential primary jurisdictions in the nation. Norton said that an early primary would not only bring racial, ethnic and economic diversity to the process now missing in the current first tier of states, but, "By selecting the District, the Party would begin to pay a debt it owes this unfailingly large and loyal Democratic Party jurisdiction-with its three reliably Democratic presidential electoral votes-beyond the Party's much appreciated platform and similar support," she said.

The timing would build on the momentum created by the historic passage of the District of Columbia Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act that, Norton said, had been passed by a Republican committee in a Republican-controlled House. "District residents would like to see some comparable action by our own party," she wrote. "Democrats may not control the House and Senate, but Democrats do control their own primary process and can use that process to help bring full democracy to the residents of the District of Columbia as well as to meet the Party's other goals."

In 2004, the District held the first unofficial primary in the nation. The primary was not sanctioned by the national party but some presidential candidates participated. Norton said the national exposure made many Americans aware of the absence of full citizenship rights in the nation's capital for the first time.

The full text of the Norton letter follows.

July 21, 2006

Ms. Alexis Herman

Mr. James Roosevelt

Co-Chairs

Rules and Bylaws Committee

The Democratic National Committee

Dear Ms. Herman and Mr. Roosevelt:

I am writing to ask that you select the District of Columbia as one of the first four presidential primary states in the nation. I recognize that this is a hotly contested issue, but I think that the District can achieve a number of goals of the Party through District participation in the primary system during the beginning season.

The District of Columbia fits the description that the DNC has determined for one of the primary states. The District is an urban center with an eclectic ethnic and economic demographic composition. In the past, the early primary and caucus states have lacked the District's racial and ethnic diversity and high profile in the nation. Moreover, selecting the District as a primary state would bring rewards for the Party beyond the addition of an important jurisdiction that brings the missing diversity that is typical of our national party. By selecting the District, the Party would begin to pay a debt it owes this unfailingly large and loyal Democratic Party jurisdiction-with its three reliably Democratic presidential electoral votes-beyond the Party's much appreciated platform and similar support.

With the recent Government Reform Committee passage of H.R. 5388, the District of Columbia Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act, there is a real chance that the District could soon get full voting representation in the House of Representatives. Providing a national forum from which to help educate the country about the denial of basic democracy to the citizens who live in their nation's capital would be an important DNC contribution to the Party's goal of a House seat and two Senators.

A clear and definitive American majority now believes the District of Columbia should have the full voting representation in the House and Senate. According to recent polls, 82% of Americans support full voting representation for District citizens in both houses, an increase of 10 percentage points in only five years. It is a matter of continuing frustration to the residents of the District of Columbia that most Americans already support full voting representation here, but think we already have it.

The District has made progress on a House vote on our way to the Senate. A Republican-controlled committee in a Republican-controlled House recently passed the District of Columbia Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act out of one committee with an almost equal number of Republican and Democratic votes supporting the bill, which is now pending in a second committee that has promised a mark-up. The bill could go to the floor of the House of Representatives soon. District residents would like to see some comparable action by our own party. Democrats may not control the House and Senate, but Democrats do control their own primary process and can use that process to help bring full democracy to the residents of the District of Columbia as well as to meet the Party's other goals.

In 2004, the District of Columbia held the first primary in the nation but without sanction from the national party. We deeply appreciated the participation of the presidential contenders who participated. As a result of the national exposure, many Americans learned about the denial of full citizenship rights in the nation's capital for the first time. In 2008, we ask our party to designate the District of Columbia as a first-in-the-nation primary state for the benefit of the party and for the greater benefit of our country by moving the United States toward full and equal citizenship for all its citizens. After 200 years as the nation's capital, most of it as loyal Democrats, we ask our party to return some of the loyalty we have generously given to the Democratic Party by designating the District of Columbia as one of the first four presidential primary jurisdictions.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Holmes Norton

cc: Rules and Bylaws Committee